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WHEN THE LEAVES COME TUMBLING DOWN

A radio conversation between Elizabeth S. Pitt, United States Forest Service, and Wallace Kadderly, Chief of the Radio Service, Department of Agriculture, broadcast September 29, 1938, in the Department of Agriculture period, National Farm and Home Hour, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 90 associated radio stations.

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★ OCT 19 1938
U. S. Department of Agriculture

WALLACE KADDERLY:

There are about 64,000 miles of roads and 18,000 miles of trails in the 160 National Forests of the United States. Mother Nature is very busy these days with her annual Fall job of painting the leaves of the trees along these roads and trails in preparation for the autumn color festival. What makes the trees change their cool summer dress of green for the warm reds and yellows of autumn? Do I hear you say that this is the work of Jack Frost? That's what I have always thought -- but Elizabeth Pitt of the United States Forest Service says No!

Well, Betsy, if Jack Frost isn't responsible, just what is the answer. I'm sure the listeners would like to know.

ELIZABETH PITT:

Mr. C. L. Forsling, head of our Division of Forest Research, says the real reason for the change in color is simply a natural preparation for winter in accordance with Nature's plan. All during the spring and summer the leaves have served as food factories--little field kitchens you might call them--to feed the trees. The food-making process is very simple and it's quite interesting.

It takes place in the thousands of tiny cells of the leaf and the work is done by the small green bodies that give the leaf its green color. When the cool Fall days come, the process of food manufacture slows down and the work of the leaves comes to an end. The machinery of the leaf factory is dismantled. Whatever food is on hand is sent to the body of the tree to be stored up for use in the spring. Now it often happens that there is more sugar in the leaf than can be readily transferred back to the tree. When this is the case, the chemical combination with the other substances produces those beautiful colors that make the forest roads and trails such an everlasting joy to nature lovers in September and October. It's actually an oxidizing process brought about by the action of light and heat similar to the process that makes rust on iron.

What is it, Wallace? You look like you want to ask a question?

KADDERLY:

I do. But I didn't realize that I was looking that way. I have been wanting to ask somebody this for years.

PITT:

Now's your chance. What is it?

(over)

KADDERLY:

Of all the trees in the United States, which ones make the most brilliant showing in the Fall?

PITT:

The number-one tree of them all for autumn color is the sumach. Mr. Forsling puts sumach first and gives the maples number-two place. Now, Wallace, can you guess what gets third place?

KADDERLY:

I'd choose the dogwood.

PITT:

And you'd be right.

KADDERLY:

Sumach, maples, dogwood -- but we can't stop there. As far as I am concerned, the aspen of the Western Mountains and the vine maples of the Far West hold their own with the maples of the East.

PITT:

I agree with you. There isn't much choice, East or West, the autumn woods are beautiful, if we only have time to get outdoors and enjoy them.

Farm and Home Friends, so many people write to the Forest Service for information about why the leaves change their color in autumn that we have prepared a brief description of this interesting phase in the life history of a tree. This description also includes information about how to make a leaf scrapbook which helps people who are learning to identify trees,-- especially school children. If you would like to have this information, send a postcard to the United States Forest Service, Washington, D. C., and ask for a copy of "Falling Leaves."

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KADDERLY:

Well, Betsy, that scrapbook idea sounds interesting. If you will leave me a copy of "Falling Leaves," I'll look it over and see if I think I can start a scrapbook and learn to identify these Eastern trees. There are so many of them that it's certainly a job for a Westerner to try to figure out what they all are.

That was Elizabeth Pitt of the Forest Service, Farm and Home Friends, giving you some interesting facts about autumn color in the woods. The roads and trails of the 160 National Forests of the United States are open to the public, and the Forest Service hopes you will use them freely this year to enjoy the annual color festival of the forests.